

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 110237

FOLLOWING REPEAT DACCA 2639 ACTION SECSTATE INFO CALCUTTA
COLOMBO ISLAMABAD KATHMANDU NEW DELHI RANGOON PEKING CINCPAC
APRIL 27

QUOTE C O N F I D E N T I A L DACCA 2639

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PBOR, BM, BG

SUBJ: BANGLADESH DEMARCHE ON ARAKANESE MUSLIM QUESTION

SUMMARY: THE BANGLADESH GOVERNMENT (BDG) BRIEFED THE
AMBASSADOR APRIL 27 REGARDING ALLEGED ACTIVITIES BY BURMESE
OFFICIALS AND MILITARY WHICH HAVE CAUSED A MOVEMENT OF
SUBSTANTIAL NUMBERS OF REFUGEES TO THE BANGLADESH BORDER
AND SOME REFUGEES ACROSS THE BORDER. ACCORDING TO BDG,
BURMESE FORCES FIRED ON THE REFUGEES APRIL 23, CAUSING
MOVEMENT ACROSS THE BORDER, AND, SINCE THEN, THERE HAD
BEEN THREE FIRING INCIDENTS BETWEEN THE BURMESE ARMY AND
THE BANGLADESH RIFLES.

THE BDG HAS NOW PROPOSED MEETINGS ON THE
GROUND BETWEEN LOCAL CIVIL AND MILITARY OFFICIALS OF BOTH
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COUNTRIES TO END THE POPULATION MOVEMENT. BANGLADESH IS PROVIDING
FOOD, SHELTER AND MEDICAL CARE TO THE REFUGEES WITHIN
BANGLADESH BUT IS CONCERNED ABOUT THE SERIOUS STATE
OF THE LARGER NUMBERS WHICH REMAIN ON THE BURMESE SIDE
OF THE BORDER. THE BDG IS UNCERTAIN ABOUT THE PRECISE
NUMBERS OF REFUGEES BUT SAYS PRESS REPORTS, WHICH SPEAK
OF 20,000 INSIDE BANGLADESH, ARE GENERALLY ACCURATE.

NO REPEAT NO REQUEST FOR U.S. ASSISTANCE OR INTERVENTION WAS MADE. END SUMMARY.

1. BANGLADESH ACTING FOREIGN SECRETARY, MANZOOR CHOUDHURY, CALLED IN THE AMBASSADOR ON APRIL 27 TO BRIEF HIM REGARDING THE ARAKANESE MUSLIM REFUGEE QUESTION ON THE BANGLADESH-BURMA BORDER. SAYING HE WAS ACTING UNDER INSTRUCTIONS FROM PRESIDENT ZIA AND THAT HE WOULD ALSO BE BRIEFING SOVIET, CHINESE, INDIAN AND "MUSLIM COUNTRY" REPRESENTATIVES, HE DESCRIBED THE FOLLOWING SITUATION.

2. IN FEBRUARY OF THIS YEAR THE BURMESE GOVERNMENT INITIATED A PROGRAM ENTITLED "OPERATION DRAGON" DESIGNED TO CHECK ON REGISTRATION CARDS POSSESSED BY ARAKANESE MUSLIMS. MANY OF THOSE APPROACHED DID NOT POSSESS CARDS DESPITE A LONG-TIME RESIDENCE OF THE REGION (SOME CARDS HAD EARLIER BEEN CONFISCATED; SOME MUSLIMS HAD BEEN AFRAID TO REGISTER). AT THAT TIME THE BDG HAD ASKED THE BURMESE GOVERNMENT TO TAKE A "HUMANITARIAN ATTITUDE"; THEN, AND ON OTHER OCCASIONS SINCE, THE BDG RECEIVED ASSURANCES THAT SUCH AN ATTITUDE WOULD BE DISPLAYED. WHEN PRESIDENT ZIA VISITED RANGOON LAST YEAR HE WAS ASSURED THAT PEOPLES GENUINELY SETTLED FOR SEVERAL GENERATIONS WOULD BE TREATED FAIRLY EVEN IF THEY HAD NO CERTIFICATES. FOLLOWING THE INITIATION OF "OPERATION DRAGON" THE FLOW OF REFUGEES INTO BANGLADESH INCREASED. THE BANGLADESH RIFLES CARRIED OUT

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INSTRUCTIONS TO FORBID ILLEGAL TRAFFIC ACROSS THE BORDER IN EITHER DIRECTION. ZIA SENT ADVISOR KAZI ANWARUL HAQUE TO RANGOON IN EARLY APRIL; HAQUE RECEIVED CATEGORICAL ASSURANCES FROM NE WIN THAT THE BURMESE WOULD INQUIRE INTO THE CAUSES OF THE OPPULATION MOVEMENT AND TAKE STEPS TO PREVENT PERSECUTION OF THE ARAKANESE MUSLIMS. ON APRIL 13 THE BURMESE FOREIGN MINISTER VISITED DACCA AND HAD DETAILED DISCUSSIONS OF THE ISSUE, ALTHOUGH THE REFUGEE FLOW AT THAT TIME WAS NOT SO LARGE AS TO CAUSE ALARM. IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE BURMESE FOREIGN MINISTER'S VISIT, THE BDG LEARNED OF "LARGE-SCALE" BURMESE TROOP MOVEMENTS TO ARAKAN STATE AND THERE WAS A MAJOR BUILD-UP OF REFUGEES ON THE BORDER. ON APRIL 23 THE BURMESE ARMY OPENED FIRE BEHIND THE REFUGEES, WOUNDING A NUMBER OF THEM AND CAUSING A PANIC, DURING WHICH MANY OF THEM BROKE THROUGH THE BORDER. THE BANGLADESH RIFLES SOUGHT TO PUSH BACK ABLE-BODIED MEN BUT ADMITTED WOMEN AND CHILDREN. SINCE APRIL 23 THERE HAVE BEEN THREE INSTANCES OF EXCHANGES OF FIRE BETWEEN THE BURMESE ARMY AND THE BANGLADESH RIFLES. AT PRESENT THERE ARE A NUMBER OF REFUGEES IN TEMPORARY CAMPS WITHIN BANGLADESH; THEY HAVE BEEN GIVEN FOOD, MEDICINES AND INOCULATIONS, AND POLY-

ETHYLENE SHEETS FOR SHELTER.

3. CHOUDHURY SAID THAT THE BDG HAD BEEN IN TOUCH WITH BURMESE GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES BOTH IN RANGOON AND DACCA AND HAD SUGGESTED THAT THE BURMESE STOP TEMPORARILY CHECKING ON CERTIFICATES, AND TAKE IMMEDIATE ACTION TO CARE FOR REFUGEES. THE BDG HAS PROPOSED THAT LOCAL CIVIL AND PARAMILITARY OFFICIALS MEET ON THE GROUND AND THAT CENTRAL GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES ALSO CONSULT. THE BURMESE HAVE NOT YET RESPONDED TO THIS PROPOSAL MADE APRIL 22.

4. THE ACTING FOREIGN SECRETARY EXPRESSED PARTICULAR CONCERN ABOUT AN ARTICLE PUBLISHED IN THE APRIL 14 ISSUE OF THE RANGOON WORKING PEOPLE'S
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DAILY DESCRIBING A POLITICAL RALLY AT WHICH IT WAS ALLEGED THAT THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF BURMA HAD CALLED INTO BURMA HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF BANGLEES WHO HAD CREATED LARGE-SCALE UNEMPLOYMENT AND "HAMPERED PEACE AND PROGRESS." PARTICIPANTS AT THIS RALLY WERE CALLED UPON TO "DESTROY THE REBELS".

5. CHOUDHURY OFFERED TWO THESES REGARDING THE CAUSE OF THE EVENTS HE DESCRIBED. ACCORDING TO THE FIRST, THE BURMESE GOVERNMENT WISHED ARAKAN STATE TO BE SETTLED BY BUDDHIST MAUNGS AND ITS OPERATION WAS DESIGNED TO ACHIEVE THIS OBJECTIVE. ACCORDING TO THE SECOND, THE BURMESE GOVERNMENT WRIT DID NOT EXTEND TO ARAKAN STATE WHERE A FEUDAL REGIME WAS CARRYING OUT ACTIVITIES ON ITS OWN.

6. THE BDG, ACCORDING TO CHOUDHURY, HAS SO FAR BEEN ABLE TO PROVIDE NECESSARY RELIEF FOR REFUGEES WITHIN BANGLADESH BUT THE MAJOR RELIEF PROBLEM PERTAINS TO LARGER NUMBERS WITHIN BURMA. THE BDG HAS VOLUNTEERED TO FACILITATE MOVEMENT OF RELIEF ARTICLES TO THOSE REFUGEES FROM THE BANGLADESH SIDE SINCE SUCH ACCESS IS EASIER THAN FROM BURMA.

7. THE FOREIGN SECRETARY MADE NO REQUEST OF THE AMBASSADOR.

8. IN RESPONSE, THE AMBASSADOR EXPRESSED HIS CONCERN AT THE HUMANITARIAN DISTRESS WHICH THIS POPULATION MOVEMENT HAS BROUGHT, WHATEVER ITS CAUSE. HE ALSO EXPRESSED A PERSONAL VIEW THAT HISTORICALLY IN THIS REGION DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN GOVERNMENTS AND MEETINGS ON THE GROUND BETWEEN CIVIL AND MILITARY OFFICIALS HAD BEEN MOST EFFECTIVE IN WORKING OUT SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS SUCH AS THIS AND NOTED THAT THE BDG HAD PROPOSED SUCH ACTIONS.
SCHNEIDER.
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